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ABSTRACT

An exploratory study sought to gain more information about the initial interactions of newly arrived international students on United States campuses--how new international students described their feelings of uncertainty before leaving their home countries and how these uncertainties impacted their interpretations of their initial interactions. Subjects were six international students enrolled full-time at a medium-sized university in the midwestern United States (three from Thailand, two from Indonesia, and one from Malaysia). Subjects completed a demographic questionnaire, an instrument to determine individualistic and collectivist tendencies, and were interviewed in-depth. Results indicated that after choosing the best country, geographic location, and institution for their study, students considered their most important uncertainties to be about the competency of their English language skills and the trials of making friends with Americans. Participants indicated that, although pre-arrival materials and post-arrival activities and orientation services were important, the level of their English skills dictated the degree of uncertainty reduction and communication satisfaction that took place. With increased knowledge, universities may be better able to develop the information sent to prospective international students and offer them a higher degree of support after their arrival in the United States. (Contains 26 references; appendixes contain the questionnaire, interview questions, and a table of data.) (RS)

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Running head: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' ADJUSTMENT

Studying in America: Assessing how Uncertainty Reduction and Communication Satisfaction Influence International Students' Adjustment to U.S. Campus Life

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Studying in America: Assessing how Uncertainty Reduction and Communication Satisfaction Influence International Students' Adjustment to U.S. Campus Life

The United States has led the world in enrollment of foreign university students for more than half a century. In addition, in the 1980s, colleges and universities in the U. S. were aware that the domestic college-bound student pool would be dramatically reduced in the 1990s. Many institutions began to increase activities to recruit students from other countries, hoping to provide opportunities for increasing intercultural awareness and to offset declining enrollment of domestic students. The increase in numbers of international students emphasizes the importance of understanding intercultural communication on U.S. college campuses. By conducting in-depth interviews with currently enrolled international students, this study will explore the communication challenges international students face during their adjustment period as new arrivals on U. S. college and university campuses. The study will examine how international students describe their feelings of uncertainty both before and after arriving at University, and what they believe contributed to those uncertainties. Understanding of these uncertainties experienced by international students will help those individuals on U.S. campuses working with international students to better accommodate and communicate with these students, to determine where miscommunication takes place,

and to assess communication satisfaction of international students.

Studies emphasizing the importance of student satisfaction during the first few weeks of their college experience are abundant. Increased satisfaction during the initial adjustment phase of new university students is known to aid in their retention (Tinto, 1984). Tinto (1987) argues that a 10 to 20 percent gain in retention can be expected when institutions have successfully attacked the issue of student retention.

Most retention problems with international students occur because of difficulty adjusting to U.S. culture, and more specifically, the culture of the U.S. college and university system. Retention problems are often the result of international students dissatisfaction with their communication interactions with teachers and other students in the classroom and in interpersonal interactions outside class. Cross-cultural adjustment refers to the process through which an individual acquires an increasing level of fitness and compatibility in the new cultural context (Kim, 1988, p. 9). While most international students eventually cope successfully (Brislin, 1981), many others have significant adjustment problems (Davis, 1995).

If schools in the United States do not find answers to the retention dilemmas of international students, it is possible that students will choose to attend universities in other parts of the world. A decline in the numbers of international students in the U. S. would place a devastating limitation on opportunities for

international and multicultural experiences of domestic students and community residents. In addition, international students do not accidentally find universities. Students conduct research to find the schools most likely to meet their needs. They read universities' publications, correspondence, and browse web pages. Students attend university fairs in their home countries. Most significantly, they consult with relatives, friends and acquaintances about the school s reputation. Word of mouth is a powerful recruitment tool. Satisfied students tell prospective students and their families.

Although much effort has been invested in the study of interactions between people of different cultures, research has neglected the specific initial interpersonal interactions between new international students and the people in their host environments and how these interactions impact international student adjustment and retention. Increasing numbers of international students coming to the United States, the need to accommodate these students, and the dearth of existing research in the areas of the uncertainty reduction and the communication satisfaction of international students, led to the proposed study.

Intercultural Communication and International Students

Intercultural communication as used in this study is "the symbolic interaction of individuals or groups who possess recognized cultural differences in perception and behavior that will significantly affect the manner, the form, and the outcome

of the encounter" (Asuncion-Lande, 1990, p. 213). Previous research areas in intercultural communication that are particularly relevant to the proposed study are Hall's high- and low-context communication distinction, Hofstede's individualism and collectivism dimension, Triandis' and Hui's theory and measurements of individualism and collectivism, and Berger's uncertainty reduction theory.

Hall's High- and Low-Context Communication

Hall (1976) describes a high-context message as "one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message" (p. 77). Hall's (1976) description of low-context communication is "just the opposite; i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code" (p. 77).

Gudykunst (1989) found an impact of high- and low-context culture on communication in initial interactions. For example, as a student from a high-context culture and a student from a low-context culture meet and begin to converse, the cultural dissimilarities may screen communication inappropriately, and misunderstandings can result. If the two students persist in the relationship, their continued communication will give each of them more accurate information with which to assess the other's behavior. As they become more familiar with each other, their communication helps them adjust, and cultural dissimilarities,

though still challenging at times, will have less affect on their assessment of each other's behavior.

Hofstede's Individualism and Collectivism Dimension

Hofstede, in his study of several nations, isolated individualism and collectivism as a cultural variable or dimension that distinguishes cultures from one another (Hofstede, 1991). Strong similarities can be found in Hofstede's individualism-collectivism dimension and Hall's high- and low-context distinction. According to Hofstede and Bond (1984) in individualism, "people are supposed to look after themselves and their immediate family only; [in collectivist cultures,] people belong to ingroups or collectivities which are supposed to look after them in exchange for loyalty" (p. 419).

Gudykunst (1983) also looked at initial intracultural (encounters between people of the same culture) and intercultural encounters (encounters between people of different cultures). Respondents in Gudykunst's study "perceived that they make more assumptions in initial intercultural encounters with strangers based upon cultural background than in initial intracultural ones" (p. 59). In later research, Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, and Chua (1988) determined that collectivistic cultures emphasize "goals, needs and views of the ingroup rather than individual pleasure; shared ingroup beliefs rather than unique individual beliefs; and a value on cooperation with ingroup members rather than maximizing individual outcomes" (p. 41).

Triandis' and Hui's Measurement of Individualism-Collectivism

Triandis (1985) used a series of studies to look at individualism and collectivism in different cultures and also to investigate the psychological counterparts for individual people, which he called "allocentrism" and "idiocentrism". An allocentric individual is one who displays collectivistic tendencies, and an idiocentric individual is one who displays individualistic tendencies. Triandis, Bontempo, and Villareal (1988) explained that individuals in collectivistic cultures tend to be allocentric, whereas persons in individualist cultures tend to be idiocentric. Also, Triandis et al. (1988) determined that "allocentric persons in individualist cultures relate to groups differently than do allocentric individuals in collectivist cultures" (p. 324).

One of the tools utilized by Triandis was the INDCOL (individualism-collectivism) scale, developed by Hui (1984). The INDCOL scale is comprised of six subscales, which were designed to measure a person s collectivistic orientation toward target groups: spouse, parents, kin, neighbors, friends, and co-workers/schoolmates. Hui utilized 63 attitude items in 7 categories to measure individualism-collectivism. Responses were scored on a scale ranging from 1 to 6. To check the reliability and validity of the INDCOL scale, Hui and Triandis (1986) sampled 49 anthropologists and psychologists from all parts of the world regarding these items, in relation to six ingroups: spouse, parents, kind, friends, co-workers, and neighbors. Hui

considered the reliability coefficient in the .60s, and in the .70's for some of the subscales to be satisfactory for measuring the complex construct of individualism-collecivism.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

Uncertainty reduction theory was first applied to the initial interactions of strangers (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Uncertainty reduction theory continues to develop as it is frequently applied by intercultural communication researchers to explain cross-cultural and intercultural relationship developments (see Gudykunst, 1988). Berger and Calabrese (1975) first theorized that "The primary function of the exchange of messages is the reduction of uncertainty" (p. 318). The new international student may have trouble interpreting behaviors displayed by strangers.

Some researchers, including Stella Ting-Toomey, have found that an individual's motivation to reduce uncertainty is important. In her 1988 commentary on Gudykunst's uncertainty reduction theory review (same volume), Ting-Toomey concludes that "not all individuals have the same baseline desire to reduce uncertainty in their relationships" (p. 373). She also suggests that cultural factors may influence the interactants' attitudes about whether they should reduce their uncertainty immediately or eventually. Ting-Toomey (1988) predicts that "individuals, coming from different cultures, may hold different conceptualizations and expectations concerning how a relationship should be defined and what constitutes appropriate or

inappropriate behaviors in each relational stage" (p. 374).

Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, and Chua (1988) reasoned that the conceptual link [to uncertainty reduction] is clearest to low-high-context, but . . . this dimension appears to be isomorphic with individualism-collectivism; specifically, low-context communication predominates in individualistic cultures, while high-context communication is prevalent in collectivistic cultures" (p. 193). In other words, Gudykunst et al. believe that the low-high-context and individualism-collectivism dimensions are equal in meaning and that people from low-context, individualistic cultures and people from high-context, collectivistic cultures approach uncertainty reduction in different ways.

Uncertainty reduction theory clearly relates to the uncertainty foreign students feel about moving to a new place, interacting with unknown students and others, the communication satisfaction they experience as a result of such interpersonal interactions, adjusting to a new climate, different foods, and a very different educational system. Since cultural differences of high- and low-context and individualism/collectivism can affect international students' ability to communicate successfully and, thereby, can forecast international students' adjustment success or failure in a non-native culture, the following research questions were posed.

RQ1. How do high-INDCOL students describe feelings of uncertainty before leaving their home countries about their anticipated initial interactions in a new culture?

RQ2. How do high-INDCOL students describe feelings of uncertainty about their initial interactions during their adjustment to campus life?

RQ3. How do high-INDCOL students describe uncertainty reduction strategies they used during their initial adjustment to campus life in order to increase their communication satisfaction?

Method

In-depth Interview

The study utilizes the in-depth interview, a qualitative methodology which has been determined to be the most appropriate for attributing broader and deeper meaning to the intercultural communication acts of initial interaction. "Interviewing... is a basic mode of inquiry. Recounting narratives of experience has been the major way throughout recorded history that humans have made sense of their experience" (Seidman, 1991, p. 2).

The present study used a semi-structured interview guide designed specifically for this investigation. Some quantitative data were needed to describe study participants. Therefore, along with the interview guide, a demographic questionnaire and an instrument to determine the individualistic and collectivistic tendencies of participants (the INDCOL scale) was used to provide quantitative data.

Participants

Because nearly two-thirds (57.8 percent) of foreign students in the United States originate from Asia (Davis, 1995), a decision was made to interview only students from Asian countries. Malaysian, Taiwanese, and Thai represented the three

largest groups of enrolled students at the university where the study took place. Three students each were non-randomly selected from Malaysia and Taiwan and four students were chosen from Thailand. There is a high probability that over time students will begin to forget important details of their initial interactions. Moreover, newly-arrived students may not have adjusted enough to make accurate assessments of their initial interactions. Therefore, in order to qualify for the proposed study, students were required to be in the United States and at the university from one to three semesters.

Questionnaires

Demographic questionnaire.

A demographic questionnaire was created to gather basic information about participants. Included were questions about family composition, parents education and occupations, participants study experiences, and language skills.

INDCOL questionnaire.

Because the study investigated the uncertainties and resulting communication behaviors of collectivist students, a method of determining the collectivistic tendencies of participants was needed. The INDCOL questionnaire was used for this purpose (see Appendix A). It was assumed that participants would demonstrate collectivist orientations because of their cultures of origin, but scores on the INDCOL scale allowed the researcher to verify this empirically. The INDCOL questionnaire identifies a person s individualistic or collectivistic

orientation, and has been used by various researchers (Triandis, 1985; Triandis et al, 1985; Hui, 1988; Triandis et al, 1988; Kim et al, 1994) to determine the individualistic and collectivistic tendencies of individuals from different cultures. Hui's original INDCOL scales included categories of questions relating to the communication targets of "spouse," "parents," "relatives,", "friends," "co-workers/classmates," "neighbors," and "acquaintances." Of these, the targets of "co-workers/classmates" and "neighbors" were judged to be most closely related to the proposed study. The questions in these two scales were reworded to increase clarity and understanding of participants.

Interview Guide

The interview guide (see Appendix B) was developed using Hui's (1984) INDCOL scale. There were three general categories of questions. Four questions were written to open the interview. These questions were designed to help the student feel comfortable in the interview setting and reconstruct experiences before leaving their home countries for the United States.

The second set of questions asked participants to describe uncertainties before leaving his/her home country and also to describe uncertainties after arrival in the U.S. The second set of questions included the following categories: (a) anticipation of uncertainties about what people and adjustment in the United States would be like; (b) initial interactions after arrival; (c) reactions to and interpretations of those interactions; and (d)

residence life and support services at the university during the adjustment period. The first and second sets of questions were open ended and encouraged each student to tell his or her story.

Questions in the final section were more direct but still allowed for the student to expand and give meaning to the recalled interactions. These questions attempted to confirm that participants' later descriptions of their uncertainties were similar to stories told earlier in the interview. This final set of questions (a) asked about the student's uncertainties; (b) how uncertainties were reduced; (c) what role his/her university played in reducing uncertainties; and (d) how his/her university can assist in reducing new international students' uncertainties in the future.

Interview Setting and Procedures

Interviews for the study were conducted, using the interview guide, in a quiet area of the Student Union lobby. The interviews followed the interview guide and lasted approximately one hour. The interviewer (the second author of this study) attempted to make each participant comfortable at the beginning of the interview. Participants were reassured that the questionnaires and interview conversations would be confidential and that any information participants give in the study would not affect their status with the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service. A small personal cassette recorder was used to audio-tape the interviews.

Summary of the Data Analysis

Tapes of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. To ensure internal validity, a communication professional, an individual who has spent several years working with international student retention, agreed to assist the researchers in thematic analysis of the data, called peer examination by Creswell, 1994. Data was identified and patterns and themes from the perspective of the participants were described. Data were organized categorically and chronologically, reviewed repeatedly, and continually coded. Thick description was used for communicating a meaningful picture of the experiences of new international students at the university. After each stage of analysis of the interview data, the coders discussed the results, providing an ongoing dialogue regarding interpretations of the participants' reality and meanings.

Data were further analyzed according to themes which were mentioned more frequently or judged by the researchers to be more important to the participants. To begin the process of analysis, the tapes were transcribed verbatim and printed out on sheets of paper. To ensure validity of the thematic analysis, a second coder also read the transcripts. A duplicate copy of the data was printed and given to the second coder, who made notes about occurring and reoccurring themes. Upon completion of the coding, two sets of themes were compared and found to be quite similar, confirming the validity of the theme selections.

Generated themes were then typed and printed out. These sheets of paper were cut into strips, with one data segment on each strip. The strips were then placed in piles according to themes which emerged from the data (i.e., "people", "English", "cultural differences"). Data segments were then retyped in the order of the generated themes. On the reordered printouts, data were analyzed a third time by highlighting particular words or phrases which were emphasized or repeated. Analysis of the data generated themes, became the categories by which the data analysis was further organized.

Results and Discussion

The participant pool consisted of six international students who were enrolled full-time at a medium-sized university in the Midwestern United States. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 27. There were two males and four females, three undergraduates and three graduate students. TOEFL scores for all participants in the study were above the scores required for admission to the University. Three participants were from Thailand. Two participants were from Indonesia. One participant was from Malaysia.

Because there were only six participants in this study, the results cannot be generalized to the larger population of international students in the United States. However, the six students in this study do provide insight into how they described the communication activities they used in the process of adjusting to campus life.

INDCOL Scale

The INDCOL scale (Hui, 1984) was used to assess empirically the participants' collectivist tendencies. According to Hui (1984), the higher the mean score on the INDCOL instrument, the higher the degree of the individual s perceived collectivism. Each participant completed the INDCOL instrument prior to the study interview and delivered it to the researcher at the interview. Because of their applicability to this study, the mean of the scores for the ten questions was figured on each of the "neighbor" and "classmate" subscales. Appendix C presents a display of the results of the INDCOL scale, which was used to confirm the collectivistic tendencies of participants.

The "neighbor" subscale scores ranged from 2.7 to 4.4, the wider range of the two subscales. The "neighbor" subscale mean score was 3.155, while the "classmate" subscale mean score was 3.10. The "classmate" subscale scores ranged from 2.8 (the same student as the 2.7 in the "neighbor" subscale above) to 3.4 (a different student than the highest mean score on the "neighbor" subscale). The combined means for each participant ranged from 2.75 to 3.7. The combined mean for the two subscales was 3.125. The mean scores data indicate that none of the participants displayed a high degree of collectivism, although they all originate from collectivistic cultures (see Appendix C).

Results of Research Questions

Research Question One

Research question one asked participants to describe

feelings of uncertainty about their anticipated initial interactions in a new culture they remember before leaving their home countries. Participants talked more about their feelings of uncertainty regarding which school to attend, in which country, and about low confidence in their English language skills than any other uncertainties. Wondering about cultural differences between people was the next most mentioned feeling of uncertainty.

Participants #4 and #8 indicated that they clearly understood the difference between uncertainty and anxiety and said they were uncertain but not anxious about future interactions with people in the U.S. The largest body of data collected was that relating to participants' lack of confidence in their English skills. Participant #4 said, "I didn't worry about what Americans would be like. I was too worried about my English!" Although the participants specified they worried more about English skills than their uncertainty about interactions with people, the researcher found it difficult to separate the two concepts. Participants would need their English skills to interact with others, and uncertainty about how competent they would be interacting in English was of primary concern.

Participant #6, a graduate student from Thailand, studied English one to two hours daily in school for twelve years but spoke it only once or twice. She believed her grammar was quite good in high school but took her only university English class during the first year of her undergraduate program. "After that,

for five to seven years, I never used English again." She had only two months to prepare to come to the U.S. and took a six-week English course during that time.

A major uncertainty mentioned by several female participants was the cultural difference regarding male-female relationships and how much freer and more openly U.S. Americans handle their relationships. Participant #4 said that from watching American movies she believed that "America is free sex!"

Participants #4 and #7 chose to live on campus in order to interact more with U.S. Americans and speak English more. This choice represented an uncertainty reduction strategy for them. Participant #7 also works on campus so he can meet more people and speak more English.

Participant #7 chose the least expensive residence hall on campus, a high-rise apartment complex. He now believes that was a mistake because apartment living doesn't encourage interaction with other students as well as a traditional residence hall setting. Participant #7 liked the other two guys in his campus apartment, but they were older. He felt he needed to live with someone his own age. So he reduced that uncertainty by inviting his best friend from Indonesia to study at the same university with him. Now they live together with some U.S. Americans in a house off-campus. He believes that no matter how close U. S. friends become, his friends from back home will always be closer.

Participants #6 and #8 realized that they would make more U.S. Americans friends if they lived on campus, and that living

off-campus probably prevented them from having more friends. Participant #6 said that living on campus would have probably helped her learn more about U.S. American culture, but she was afraid of living with someone she didn't know, especially someone from a culture she was not familiar with.

Several of the participants said they were uncertain about what people would be like, but "not scared." Some of them had thought about it, while others said they had not thought about it at all. Of the participants who had thought about it, some believed they knew what Americans would be like (from movies and television). They felt certain about it but found their certainties to be inaccurate during their initial interactions.

In summary, the data from research question number one generated three themes. Themes generated were: (a) choosing the right school in the best educational system for them; (b) English competency, and (c) interactions with people in the new culture. Participants indicated they had reliable resources for information on choosing the best school and were not as uncertain about the educational aspect of studying abroad. However, participants were not as certain about their English competency. In fact, they were more concerned about using English regularly than any other theme. Participants were more concerned about how they would handle human relationships in the new culture than any of the other themes they discussed.

Research Question Two

The second research question asked students to describe feelings of uncertainty about their initial interactions during their adjustment to campus life. The question addressed participants' feelings of uncertainty during their first interactions on campus. Themes generated by this question included cultural differences in greetings and conversation styles, knowing how to make friends, and differences in expected classroom behavior for both teachers and students. As in the other questions, The "English language skills" theme emerged from a preponderance of the data.

Several participants mentioned that greetings are different. Participant #1 spoke extensively about his surprise that people say "Hi" and "Bye" to you everywhere:

> People in Malaysia don't say "Hi" to you....People don't bother about you, you don't bother about them, they mind their own business. They won't even see you or nod at you, whereas here, everybody says "Hi" to you ..., like, "How are you doing today?". It is very new to me. I was surprised. (Participant #1)

Other participants mentioned that they found it difficult to make good friends here. These participants also mentioned that although people in the U.S. smile, say "Hi" and seem to be friendly, "they don't get too personal with you, that's it, 'Hi-Bye' kind of friends" (Participant #1).

Most participants mentioned that the relationships between friends, acquaintances, and classmates are perceived differently in the U.S. than in their home cultures. In the participants'

collectivistic cultures, classmates naturally are a closer group. "If you re going to be in class with someone, you will quickly be accepted, cared about, and people will be nice to you" (Participant #1).

Participant #6 said that in her second semester she took five classes and was busy, so she didn't take the time to talk with Americans. "Now sometimes I don't know what to talk about with them....you know, the conversation that you talk every day." During her third semester at SMSU, Participant #6 said she talked a little in class with the American student from whom she borrowed notes. However, she only spoke to her classmate when she didn t understand the notes.

Participant #7 also talked about cultural differences in communication styles and their impact on his uncertainties during initial interactions.

> I guess it's American culture, if they don't know somebody they just avoid them, and that makes me feel that . . . I am a foreigner, so that's why they are avoiding me. But many of them say that they are used to doing it to all the people, so I guess I learned a little bit about it. (Participant #7)

Participants #7 and #8 indicated that they were uncertain about using their English in class. Participant #8 said she was not concerned about it, but Participant #7 was uncertain if he could handle it. He spoke about being

> a little bit scared about the classroom, because I never learned really in English in my class before, and I'm afraid that I cannot catch up with the language, and the teacher will talk fast, and it scared me really bad. But it's all right, here it's all right. Some of them, they are too fast, but it's all right. (Participant #7)

Participant #6 said she also realized that class participation was very important and she had tried to adjust her classroom behavior from the norm in Thailand (never to ask questions or speak in class) to the U.S. norm (to be an active class participant), but she could only make herself ask the teacher questions after class. In her third semester, she still couldn't bring herself to ask the teacher questions in class, "even if I try."

Participant #6 spoke about her uncertainties regarding her English competency and her lack of confidence to introduce herself when asked by the teacher during her first class period. "I have never done that before in my country, even in my class. And I don't know what to say. What should I speak about myself, to let other people know?"

The results of research question two generated several themes of participants' uncertainties as they interacted for the first time with people in the United States. These uncertainties included differences in greetings and conversation styles, knowing how to make friends, and expected classroom behavior. As in the other questions, the theme "English language skills" was discussed more than any other.

Research Question Three

Research question three addresses uncertainty reduction strategies participants used during their initial interactions with people in the U.S. in order to increase their communication satisfaction. Although the question relates to uncertainty

reduction strategies during participants' initial interactions in the U.S., participants also discussed uncertainty reduction strategies used before leaving home. These uncertainty reduction strategies began to be used as participants made decisions about where to study abroad. Uncertainty reduction strategies were used to select the country where they would study, the area of the country, and the institution they would attend.

Participant #7 believes that there are not many successful ways to reduce uncertainty before leaving home. "I have to live here, and I have to experience it myself, then I know how to do it." Participant #1 learned that the British educational system can be more challenging than that of the U.S. He was also concerned that, as an average student, if he failed one class in the British system, he would be required to retake the entire year, whereas in the U.S. students could drop a class that was too difficult or retake only the class in which they received a failing grade.

Participant #8 reduced her uncertainties about countries and schools by reading books at the embassies and watching American movies. She also went to Bangkok Bank, an agency which places students in schools abroad, and to a private school where people go to prepare for the TOEFL. These tasks helped to reduce uncertainty and the student reported that she probably would not be as satisfied with her communication in the United States if she had not done this previous legwork.

Arrival week activities and meeting immediate needs were

mentioned as uncertainties by several participants. Participant #6 said she liked it that her Thai friends took her everywhere after she arrived. "That reduced my uncertainty. Because if I came here and nobody took care of me, I would have to learn a lot, but the first time I came here they told me the things I have to do," such as applying for a Social Security number and making an appointment with her academic adviser.

Participant #7 indicated he likes to meet people from different cultures and guess where they are from by observing their habits and accents. "Sometimes it works." He tries to learn their conversation styles, and enjoys talking to them for a while. But if the adjustment of conversation style is too difficult for him, he ends the conversation. Participant #6 uses observation as an uncertainty reduction technique to learn about others, because she is somewhat shy and a self-described introvert. She also knows about several other uncertainty reduction strategies that, because of her introversion, she does not use.

Participant #7 found humor to be an especially helpful uncertainty reduction strategy. Although humor is known to be difficult to translate across cultures, he has learned how to adjust his jokes to U.S. American style and sometimes uses the excuse of limited English skills as a joke to lighten up the conversation with friends. When things got a little tense and he was not sure what to say, he just said, "No English!", as if he did not understand the conversation. His U.S. American friends

knew that he was just kidding, and they laughed. The strategy of humor reduced this students's uncertainty and likely increased communication satisfaction.

Participants indicated they used friends and relatives as uncertainty reduction sources more often than any other strategy. Some participants also sought information through schools and placement agencies. After arriving in the United States, participants used other uncertainty reduction strategies, such as seeking out native English speakers for conversation practice, and even using humor to actively seek and develop friendships.

Future Research Regarding Communication Satisfaction

Although the title of this study includes both constructs of uncertainty reduction and communication satisfaction in determining how international students adjust to U.S. campus life, the major focus of this paper is on uncertainty reduction strategies used by international students. Because international students' communication satisfaction can influence whether or not they will continue college, or if they enjoy their experience with U.S. higher education, communication satisfaction demands the attention of research. In a proposed later study, the researchers would like to quantitatively measure the communication satisfaction of international students and determine if their is a statistically significant connection between communication satisfaction and international students reports of reduction of uncertainty and adjustment to U.S. campus life. Communication satisfaction is defined as "an effect

crucial to the concepts of psychological health and, therefore, is a useful construct which should prove useful in the study of communication behavior" (Hecht, 1978, p. 253). For example, an international student might have a problem taking part in class discussion, because cultural values of the student enforce the idea that students are to be reticent and not openly confront others in class, especially the teacher. If the teacher of that course lets the international student know that they understand the cultural reasons of why the student is not participating, and not that the student does not care or is prepared, then communication satisfaction for the international student is likely enhanced.

According to Hecht, "the (communication-satisfaction) inventory should prove valuable in assessing the causes of communication satisfaction by providing an outcome measure of process effects" (p. 262). The Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory has exhibited high reliability figures 90's and content, convergent, and concurrent validity when used to measure communication satisfaction with friends, acquaintances, or strangers in actual, recalled, or role play conversations (Hecht, 1978; Hecht, 1984). Evidence from interviews conducted for the present study indicate that international students' communication satisfaction should be examined through actual recalled situations students have encountered in the classroom, and in interpersonal interactions outside the classroom shortly after they have arrived in the

United States. By using the Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory, the authors of this study hope to triangulate data from interviews with international students in order to get both a quantitative and qualitative perspective of how international students adjust to life on college and university campuses in the United States.

Summary

This study was an exploratory attempt to gain more information about the initial interactions of newly arrived international students on U.S. campuses. The study generated data about how new international students describe their feelings of uncertainty before leaving their home countries for the United States and how these uncertainties impacted their interpretations of their initial interactions after arriving as well as communication satisfaction. The results indicate that after choosing the best country, geographic location, and institution for their study, students consider their most important uncertainties to be about the competency of their English language skills and making friends with Americans. Participants indicated that, although pre-arrival materials and post-arrival activities and orientation services are important, the level of their English skills dictate the degree of uncertainty reduction and communication satisfaction that takes place using these methods.

With increased knowledge, universities may be better able to develop the information sent to prospective international

students and offer them a higher degree of support after their arrival in the United States. The increased attention paid to the early adjustment of international students will aid in their communication satisfaction, retention, and success in U. S. university study.

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Appendix A
INDCOL Questionnaire

Please read the following statements and write in the blank the number corresponding to too much you agree or disagree. The number 5" will indicate that you complete agree , 4" mostly agree , 3" neither agree nor disagree , 2" mostly disagree , and 1" indicating you completely disagree .

NEIGHBOR

_____N1. I have never chatted with my neighbors about the political future of this country.

_____N2. I am often influenced by the moods of my neighbors.

_____N3. My neighbors always tell me interesting stories that have happened around them.

_____N4. I am not interested in knowing what my neighbors are really like.

_____N5. One need not worry about what the neighbors say about whom one should marry.

_____N6. I enjoy meeting and talking to my neighbors.

_____N7. In the past, my neighbors have never borrowed anything from me or my family.

_____N8. One needs to be cautious in talking with neighbors, otherwise others might think you are nosy.

_____N9. I don t really know how to befriend my neighbors.

_____N10. I feel uneasy when my neighbors do not greet me when we come across each other.

CLASSMATE

_____C1.It is inappropriate for a teacher to ask students about their personal lives (such as where one plans to go for the next vacation).

_____C2. When I am among my classmates, I do my own thing without minding about them.

_____C3. One needs to return a favor if a colleague lends a helping hand.

_____C4. I have never lent my camera/coat to any classmates.

_____C5. We ought to develop the character of independence among students, so that they do not rely upon other students help in their schoolwork.

_____C6. Several students after class were discussing where to eat. A popular choice was a restaurant which had recently opened.However, someone in the group had discovered that the food there was not good. Yet the group disregarded this person s objection and insisted on trying it out. There were only two choices for the person who objected: to go or not to go with the others. In this situation not going with the others is a better choice.

_____C7. There is everything to gain and nothing to lose for classmates to group themselves for study and discussion.

_____C8. Classmates assistance is indispensable to getting a good grade at school.

_____C9. I would help if a classmate told me that he/she needed money to pay utility bills.

_____C10. In most cases, to cooperate with someone whose ability is lower than one s own is not as desirable as doing the thing alone.

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Warmup questions:

A. How did you become interested in studying outside your country?
B. How did you choose the United States?
C. How did you choose this University?

Now, think back to the time when you were getting ready to come to the United States. You may have felt intense, somewhat anxious, quite excited, and maybe a little scared. You were uncertain about what to bring, such as clothing and personal items, the required documents, and so on. Are you back there now? Good.

D. What were some of the other things you may have been uncertain about? Between all the necessary planning and taking care of details, you wondered what it would be like at this University, you had some ideas and you thought about them sometimes, but there were so many things you just couldn t imagine.

Interview questions:

1. From what sources did you learn about what people in the United States would be like?

2. How confident were you that you knew what other students would be like: from the U.S.? Other international students? Faculty? Community residents?

3. Did you feel particularly uncertain about any particular aspect of adjusting to your new educational home?

4. Were you uncertain about how to meet other students: From the U.S.? Other international students? Faculty? Staff? Community residents?

5. On a scale of 1-10, with one being easy and 10 being difficult, how easy or difficult was your adjustment to the United States and this University? What do you think made it that way?

6. What time period following your arrival in the U. S. do you remember as being the most difficult for you? First day? First week? Can you tell me why?

7. Who were the people you met during that time?

8. Which Campus faculty or staff did you meet?

9. Can you tell me about those meetings?

10. How many students did you meet? Of those, how many were international? How many from your country? How many from the U. S.?

11. How long did it take you to meet other students? (When did you meet the first student?)

12. Tell me about those meetings.

13. What surprised you about your new acquaintances:

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From your culture?
From other international cultures?
From the U. S.?

14. Did you become close friends with any of the people you met during this period?

15. Of the students you later became close friends with, how many were people you met during that first week?

16. Why do you suppose it happened that way?

17. Did you live on campus during that time period? Where?

18. What was it like in your residence?

19. If you lived on campus, how did it help or hinder your adjustment?

20. If you lived off campus, how did it help or hinder your adjustment?

21. Were you assigned an "International Friend" (host family) in the community?

22. How did they contact you?

23. When did they first contact you?

24. When did you first meet your host family? Tell me about that meeting.

25. In what activities did you participate with them?

26. Were these positive experiences? In what way?

Now, let s talk a little about your uncertainties:

27. Now that you ve had some time to think about them, what were the most important things that you were uncertain about before leaving home?

28. Can you tell me, one by one, how you believe those uncertainties were reduced?
Were they reduced before you left home? On your way to the U.S.?
Between the port of entry and _____.? After your arrival in _____?
At international orientation? At SOAR? After the opening of classes? Other???

29. What role did you plan in reducing those uncertainties?

30. What role(s) did the university play? The ISSO? The ELI program?
The International Friends Program? The AIS Cultural Organization?
Campus Faculty? Campus Staff? Your campus employer?

31. In what ways do you believe the University could assist in reducing new international sudents' uncertainties: Before leaving home? During arrival week (before orientation)? Between orientation and the opening of classes? During the first week of classes?

Appendix C
Results of INDCOL Questionnaire

	Participant #1	Participant #2	Participant #4	Participant #6	Participant #7	Participant #8	Question
NEIGHBOR							
N1	5	2	5	5	4	5	
N2	1	1	2	2	1	5	
N3	1	4	4	1	3	5	
N4	1	3	2	4	2	3	
N5	5	5	4	3	4	5	
N6	3	4	3	1	3	4	
N7	5	2	2	5	3	5	
N8	5	3	4	3	3	4	
N9	5	2	2	4	2	5	
N10	5	2	3	4	2	3	
CLASSMATE							
C1	1	2	1	1	2	2	
C2	5	3	1	4	2	4	
C3	1	5	5	4	3	3	
C4	5	4	5	5	4	5	
C5	5	4	5	4	3	3	
C6	1	4	1	4	2	1	
C7	5	4	5	4	3	4	
C8	3	3	4	4	3	3	
C9	4	2	3	1	2	2	
C10	4	1	1	2	4	3	

Mean Scores: Neighbor - 3.155 Classmate - 3.10 Combined - 3.125
Average Scores: Neighbor - 2.475 Classmate - 2.35 Combined - 2.413

5 = Completely Agree, 1 = Completely Disagree
The higher the mean, the higher the degree of perceived collectivism.